A

SERMON.

PREACHED

(BY COURTSEY)

IN THE

GERMAN REFORMED CHURCH,

At NEW-YORK.

By Rev. GEORGE STREBECK.

NEW-YORK:
Printed by TIEBOUT & O'BRIEN,
1796.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IT was not the Authors intention, in Compoſing the following ſhort Diſcourſe, ever to have committed it to the Preſs; but ſome of his Friends, being particularly Edified by it when delivered from the Pulpit, expreſſed a deſire to ſee it in Print. He ſubmits it to their requeſt, and hopes the Indulgent Reader, will make every allowance for an Infant Genius, and ſpare himſelf the trouble of making any ſevere Criticiſms.

A

SERMON.

ISAIAH, XXXVIII.—1 *Ver. latter part.*

Set thine Houſe in order, for thou ſhalt die and not live.

THESE words, my brethren, are a Maſſage which the Lord commanded the Prophet Iſaiah to deliver to King Hezekiah, when, as we read he was "*Sick unto Death.*"—Upon the hearing of which, the good King, who had walked before the Lord in truth, with a perfect heart, and had done that which was right in his ſight, was ſenſibly affected. There can be no impropriety in it, if we alſo receive theſe words as a Meſſage ſent from God unto us; and great will be our advantage if we permit them to have ſo ſalutary an influence on our hearts as we find they had upon the heart of the good King before us. We have entered now, my brethren, upon the Threſhhold of another year, it is highly proper for us then to ſtand ſtill, to look around us and conſider, and to anticipate the events that may befall us in the Year while we are entering upon it; and while we anticipate its events—to make it our conſtant endeavour, that we may be prepared to meet them with Chriſtian fortitude, and calmneſs of mind.

I need ſcarely remind you, that in the courſe of the preſent year, events unthought and unforeſeen will take place with regard to your perſons, or your circumſtances—a bare retroſpection on the experience of paſt Life, will fix this truth indeliably upon your minds. How mutable and fluctuating are the ſcenes of Mortal Life!—even *Man* himſelf, the finiſhed ſtroke of all creation, is of few days; like the frail flower that ſprings up, and is cut down;—or the ſhadow that flees away, and continues not!*—yea, even as

" ——— Life's paſſing breath, blown up from Earth
" Light, as the Summers duſt; we take in Air
" A moments giddy flight, and fall again;
" Join the dull maſs, encreaſe the trodden ſoil,
" And ſleep 'till Earth herſelf ſhall be no more."

Than this, nothing is more true, and to human ſenſe nothing more clearly demonſtrated *that we muſt die;* yet, how unprepared the moſt of Men, candid obſervation fully proves! O how depraved, and how diſordered this houſe of Clay!—what ſtrange alienation of affection from God diſcovers itſelf in the immortal Spirit!—and what vicious habits run through the whole tenor of Mans Life!—Under this view of the major part of mankind, what is more proper on the entrance into a New Year, than to remind them of their approaching diſſolution? and to call upon them in the language of the Text, to *Set their houſe in order, becauſe they ſhall die and not live?*

It ſhall be my buſineſs in this Diſcourſe, from theſe very important words, to *ſhew the neceſſity of a rectification of our diſorders from the idea of death;* in doing which I ſhall

1. Deſcribe the rectification of our diſorders.
2. Shew its *neceſſity* from the idea of Death.

* Job 14—1, 2.

After we have gone through the explication of the ſubject in this manner, it ſhall be our care to improve it ſuitably to the occaſion.

I. In ſpeaking of the rectification of our diſorders, in order that we may know what it is that we are to rectify, it is neceſſary to ſay ſomething *firſt* concerning theſe diſorders; and then ſpeak to the rectification of them.

The prophet Iſaiah, is very explicit in deſcribing our diſorders in the firſt Chapter, in the 5th and 6th verſes; where he declares, that " *The whole head is ſick, and the whole heart faint: from the ſole of the foot even unto the head, there is no ſoundneſs, but wounds, bruiſes, and putryfying ſores.*"—Theſe words being fully deſcriptive of the total depravity of Man, we may draw information from them concerning his *internal* and his *external* diſorders.

That Man is internally depraved and has his mental faculties deranged we may conclude from the Prophets repreſenting him as being *ſick at heart*, even to a degree of *Spiritual faintneſs*. " The whole—heart is faint"—how faint and feeble its motion toward the Supreme Author of exiſtance! —how languid and cold its warmeſt devotion!—How enervated the ſacred ſprings of deſire after, and fond affection towards God!—How fixed the attention, and centered are its wiſhes on things below! and how does the deſire rove on things that can give no permanent enjoyment to an immortal Spirit!—How often does the ſoul in this diſordered condition " Call her wiſh, and when it comes, ſend it back, and ſay ſhe call'd another; which, when it arrives, meets the ſame welcome?"—Is not ſuch empty wiſhing " the conſtant *hectic* of a fool?"—Does it not ſhew the deranged ſenſe, and obſcured reaſon of its diſordered

ſubject?—Yes; and how conſpicuouſly does the ſame truth diſcover itſelf in the ſtrong attachment which ſhe has formed toward tranſitory things!

"See how ſhe grovels here below,
"Fond of theſe Earthly toys."

It was not ſo in the beginning—Love Supreme was duly rendered to the Creator; but now through the depravity and mental diſorder of the Soul, the Creature is ſerved more than the Creator,"* who is "God over all bleſſed for ever!"†

Add to this, what is the certain conſequence of our inward depravation, external diſorders of a moral kind cleave faſt to us—"The whole head is Sick—from the ſole of the foot even to the head, there is no ſoundneſs, but wounds, bruiſes, and putryfying ſores." Sad and humbling deſcription of the natural ſtate of Man!—O! how unlike the beautiful primeval excellence in which he was firſt Created! View mankind in their practices in life—inſpect their public ways and private walks; and behold what a group of hateful crimes ſtart forth to view!—Turn your eye on one hand and you may ſee the ſmoaking blood ſpilt by the hand of murder, aſcend to Heaven crying for vengeance on the guilty perpetrator of the horrid deed—Caſt your eye from hence to the other ſide, there you may behold a perjured race, living in a manner regardleſs of truth; or the ſacred bonds of Faith and Verity between Man and Man—Caſt your eye from theſe, penetrate the gloom of nocturnal darkneſs, and behold what hidden ſcenes of uncleanneſs ariſe to ſhock the ſight, and abaſh the modeſt eye! But, enough! daily obſervation confirms the truth, that in his depravity Man is inwardly and outwardly diſordered.

* Romans 1—25. † Romans 9, 5.

As our diſorders are, ſo muſt our rectification be alſo. If, as we have ſeen, we are inwardly and outwardly depraved, then we muſt be inwardly and outwardly rectified; or elſe our rectification would not be a compleat and full removal of our diſorders.

By the internal rectification which removes our mental diſeaſes, we underſtand briefly, *a change of heart;* but this general explication includes ſeveral other particulars which are neceſſary here to be taken notice of.—That we may enjoy a ſaving change of heart, two things are indiſpenſably neceſſary; and theſe are an illumination of the underſtanding, and a rectification of the Will.

Our underſtanding being clouded by nature, through the deluſive nature of ſin, we cannot with our mental eye, ſee as we *ought* and *muſt ſee;* wherefore that we may have a proper diſcovery of the purity of Gods Law—of our own ſinfulneſs—and of the precious and ample nature of Chriſts Atonement, God illuminates our minds with heavenly light. This the Apoſtle Paul uniformly teaches "God who commanded the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, hath ſhined into our hearts, to give the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jeſus Chriſt."* Which alſo appears to have been the experience of the Epehſian Chriſtians, whom Paul addreſſes thus, "Ye were ſometimes darkneſs, but now are ye light in the Lord."†

In our natural ſtate, the will is alſo perverſe, and the affections placed on wrong objects. The rectification of our diſorders ſuppoſes then that this perverſion of the Will is removed, and that the Soul under the influence of

* 2 Cor. 4, 6. † Ephes. 5, 8.

Divine Grace, is brought to chooſe God and his ſervice as its delight; to love him from a ſenſe of his love firſt ſhewn towards her*, and to rejoice in him with ſupreme delight. "Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none on he Earth that I deſire beſides thee."†

But this removal or rectification of our diſorders, includes not only an inward change, but, what is a neceſſary conſequence of ſuch a work of Grace upon the heart, an outward change of the life and converſation. There are too many in the world, who, laying much ſtreſs upon good works, think that they ſhall even be ſaved by the merit of them: Theſe talk much of Morals, upright conduct, &c. when perhaps, they have never experienced that internal change, which has been ſpoken of;—when in their hearts they have never felt the warm, ſincere, and grateful emotions of true love towards God.

"Talk they of Morals? O thou bleeding love!
"Thou maker of new Morals to mankind!
"The grand Morality is love to thee.

What a proper conception of this ſubject the ingenious Poet had "*The grand Morality is love to God*;" that is, as if he had ſaid, Why all this parade about Morality? can any thing that is good proceed from a fountain corrupt? equally impoſſible is it for a ſoul unoccupied by the love of God, to ſend forth good and pleaſant Works; but, if the heart is filled with love to God, then it will produce Morality of the moſt approved and genuine kind. Such then, my brethren, is the rectification of our diſorders, which I propoſed to explain; permit me yet to ſum up the whole in the very clear and beautiful deſcription which the Apoſtle gives us of it in 2d Cor. 5 and 17 verſe, "If any Man be in Chriſt Jeſus, he is a new Creature; old things are done away, and behold all things are become new."

* Jn. 4, 19. † Pm. 73, 25.

There is one thing more which it is neceſſary to notice in this place, and that is the means by which ſuch a rectification of our diſorders is to be effected. Vain are the efforts of Eſculapian aid, our diſorders are paſt the art of Mortal Man to cure! but there is a Phyſician above, adequate to the taſk, and balm enough in Gilead* that we may be healed. Let us then,

" ——— Survey the wond'rous cure,
" And at each ſtep, let higher wonder riſe!"

If we only conſider ſome of the particulars that are intimately and inſeparably, connected with our reſtoration to grace and favor with God, it is impoſſible for us not to be overcome with aſtoniſhment and admiration. The pardon of our ſins, is intimately connected with it, and if we but conſider this attentively, how aſtoniſhing is the view in which it is repreſented!—It is

" A pardon for infinite offence! and pardon
" Thro' means that ſpeak its value infinite!
" A pardon bought with blood! with blood divine!
" With blood divine of him, I made my foe!
" Perſiſted to provoke! tho' woo'd, and aw'd,
" Bleſt, and chaſtis'd, a flagrant rebel ſtill!
" A rebel 'midſt the thunders of his throne!
" Nor I alone, a rebel univerſe!
" My ſpecies up in Arms! not one exempt!
" Yet for the fouleſt of the foul, he dies!

Such then my hearers, is the means by which our fatal maladies are removed! even the precious atonement of Jeſus Chriſt, who was made Sin† (Gr. a ſin-offering) for us, that we might be delivered from our ſins, and obtain a free and full pardon for them; for " He was delivered for our offences, and roſe again for our Juſtification."‡ But now the queſtion is, how does this bleſſed Phyſician apply his all-ſovereign remedy to the removal of our diſorders? The

* Jer. 8, 22. † 2 Cor. 5, 21. ‡ Rom. 4—25.

anſwer is, he applies it through the operation of his bleſſed Spirit, through which he quickens us—infuſes heavenly grace into the ſoul, and reſtores us to newneſs of life—— to that life which will ſurvive the wreck of natures ruin, and remain for ever.———I proceed,

II. To ſhew the neceſſity of this rectification of our diſorders from the idea of death.

Two things are here contained, which are neceſſary to be taken notice of. Let us then *firſt* explain the idea of death; and then attend to the proof of our propoſition.

With regard to Death, it is proper to enquire *what* and *why* it is? The moſt proper definition of Death is, that it is the diſſolution of the connection which ſubſiſts between the ſoul and the body, and the termination of a Mans exiſtence in this world.

This definition of Death, leads back our thoughts to the original conſtitution of Man, which informs us, that he is made up of two conſtituent parts, namely, of the *Soul* and *Body*; theſe two, compoſe one Man, being united together; hence the proper definition of a Man is, that he is a Being endowed with a rational and immortal ſoul. Now the ſoul and the body of which man is compoſed, are different in their nature—the body was compoſed of the particles of Earth;* whereas the ſoul was breathed into it, by the breath of the Almighty.†—And as they are different in their origin, ſo their end differs likewiſe; for in death, which diſſolves this connection between the ſoul and the body, Solomon tells us‡ that "The duſt ſhall return to the Earth as it was, and the ſpirit ſhall return to God who gave it." Here is the termination of a mans life:—His days now ſpent, "he goes to his long home, and the mourners go about the ſtreets."§

* Gen. 2, 7.
† Gen. 2, 7.
‡ Eccles. 12, 7.
§ Eccles. 12, 5.

The reaſon why death thus prevails over men, and cuts ſhort the thread of life, is plain in the hiſtorical account which is given us of mans tranſgreſſion and fall. "In the day thou eateſt of the fruit of this forbidden tree, thou ſhalt ſurely die."*—He eat! and ſad effect, mortality was in his nature ſown!—Thus by ſin death entered into the world, and paſſed upon all men, becauſe that all have ſinned.†

Since then, through ſin we are expoſed to death‡, would it not be wiſe in us, to have every thing removed that can make death appear terrible to us? and what is it that can deliver us from the fearful forebodings of death? Nothing my brethren, but a ſenſe of our intereſt in Chriſt, by the infuſion of whoſe grace into our ſouls, we are healed of all the maladies which ſin has entailed upon us, and gain a complete victory over the fear of death.§

From the purſuits of many in the world, we ſhould almoſt be ready to conclude that they had no idea of death! and yet there is nothing more certain. See the Miſer and the ambitious Man, how they toil for wealth and fame. The one riſes early and retires late, eating the bread of covetuouſneſs, that he may amaſs wealth together, the God and Idol of his niggardly ſoul!—Behold the other forming his favorite plans and wrecking his inventive powers to execute them, that he may gain fame and honor among Men;—But

"Why all this toil for the triumphs of an hour?
"What tho' we wade in wealth, and ſoar in fame?
"Earths higheſt ſtation ends in "*Here he lies*"
"And "*Duſt to duſt*" concludes her nobleſt ſong.

* Gen. 2, 17.
† Rom. 5, 12. ‡ Rom. 6, 23.
§ 1 Cor. 15, 55—57.

If then death is ſo certain, that ſeeing the eternal Jehōvah himſelf hath appointed it;* and even the means of it are implanted in our very nature:†—Ought we not as men of reaſon, from this conſideration, to diſcover the neceſſity of being prepared to meet it? Many do, no doubt, diſcover this neceſſity, and often reſolve to make that ſuitable preparation which is neceſſary before it arrives; but ſtill they delay. If there are ſuch preſent, liſten to the good and wholeſome advice of the Poet.——

" Be wiſe *to day*, 'tis madneſs to defer;
" Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
" Thus on, 'till wiſdom is puſh'd out of life.
" *Procraſtination* is the thief of Time;
" Year after year it ſteals, 'till all are fled,
" And to the mercies of a moment leaves
" The vaſt concerns of an eternal ſcene.

The ſudden manner in which Death may attack us, and often does attack our ſpecies, is another conſideration why we ſhould ſeek to have the maladies of ſin ſpeedily removed from us. How often that grim King of Terrors, invades the human frame, without giving a previous alarm, is full well known; but admitting this ſhould not be the caſe, ſhould Death make his approach to us in a more

" ——————— Slow ſudden pace,
" How dreadful that deliberate ſurprize!"

What, my brethren, is the longeſt extremity of our ſhort-liv'd exiſtance? if we even behold it in its utmoſt extent, it appears ſhorter, infinitely ſhorter than the dreary winters day! and vaniſhes away as the vapour, and as the tale that is told!—Well then may we ſay, that

* Heb. 9, 27. † Rom. 8, 10.

" Lifes little ſtage is a ſmall eminence,
" Inch-high *the grave above* ; that home of Man,
" Where dwells the multitude ; we gaze around ;
" We read their monuments ; we ſigh ; and while
" We ſigh, we ſink ; and are what we deplor'd !

If then it is certain that we muſt die—if death is always thus near us ;—and if we, dying in an unprepared condition, will find the reſult thereof our eternal diſadvantage, none can heſitate to pronounce this preparation neceſſary in the higheſt degree :—and, that this preparation for death conſiſts in our being delivered from the mental and external diſorders, which ſin has entailed upon us—and in our reſtoration to the divine favor, is evident ; therefore the removal of theſe our diſorders, is abſolutely neceſſary ; and more eſpecially ſo, ſince in our preſent polluted condition, we are obnoxious to the ſight of God, and totally unfit to dwell in the pure manſions of heavenly felicity, where nothing impure can ever be admitted.*——Let us then be wiſe to learn from the certainty of death, and the ſuddenneſs of the manner, in which it may ſurprize us, always to be prepared to meet it, by having our diſorders healed, and " Our hearts ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, by the precious blood of Jeſus."†

It is time that I now proceed to make ſome improvement of this ſerious ſubject, ſuitable to the occaſion. We have heard, and liſtened with attention to the diſcription which has been given of our natural ſtate ; and believe me, neither the Prophet nor the Preacher, have in the leaſt exaggerated it ; let us be humbled under the doleful and ſtriking view ; then, and only then will the pride of the heart be conquered ; and not till then can we have that proper view of death, which is neceſſary in order to ſtir us up to a degree of holy intrepidity, and pious reſolution to prepare to meet it.

* 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. † Heb. 10. 19, 22.

We are well convinced of the certainty of death; and frequent inſtances of its ſudden approaches occur to convince us that we are every moment bordering on the dread confines

" ——— Where Eternity begins."

Perhaps we are now building our mountain hopes, and planing ſchemes for future time; but it may be well for us to remember, that perhaps we may be called as it were, premature from our ſchemes, and then if the grand ſcheme of learning in life how to die, is not carried into effect, all is loſt forever!

I have been preaching to you, my brethren, on this New Years day, on the ſolemn ſubject of Death; I was led to this ſubject from the Prophet Jeremiah's ſolemn declaration to Hananiah, " *This Year, thou ſhalt die.*"* And it is more than probable, that theſe words will prove equally true, with regard to ſome of us that are aſſembled here this New Years Morning, as they did to Hananiah. Perhaps, my hearers, before this year revolves, I that now ſpeak to you, or ſome of you that hear me, may die and be laid low in the cold ſilent caverns of the Earth!—O! how ſolemn and how awful the thought: Eternity always ſurrounds us, and the brighteſt day we ſee, tho' illumined with celeſtial ſplendour hangs out the Signia of

" ——— Death in one eternal night;
" A night that glooms us in the noon-tide ray,
" And wraps our thought, at banquets, in the ſhroud."

Let us then, my friends, conſider ourſelves as dying mortals; and being ſuch, let us ſtrive to live this year as we would wiſh to die, and ever be prepared for that awful event——then ſhould it come ſooner or later, it ſhall only, on pinions ſwifter than thought, tranſport our ſouls to realms of endleſs day!—Which may God of his infinite mercy grant, to be our final happy lot, for Chriſts ſake———AMEN.

* Jer. 28---16.